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SUBJECT: ALEXANDRIA GOVERNORATE PARTIALLY DEMOLISHES NGO MEDICAL FACILITY

¶1. (SBU) A medical services NGO administered by the Anglican Church in Alexandria was partially demolished February 13 on orders from the Alexandria Governorate for operating in an unlicensed building. Similar demolitions have occurred elsewhere in Alexandria recently as part of a campaign by the new Governor of Alexandria to rein in unlicensed construction. The Anglican NGO was the only building in its immediate neighborhood to be affected, raising suspicions among church officials and UK diplomats that it was singled out for association with a foreign group or a Christian entity, or both.

¶2. (SBU) The medical facility was completed in late 2006 and provided basic medical and dental services to the local community which was underserved by the Egyptian health system. Church activities and services were also held on the site. The demolition resulted in the destruction of the center's walls but not its support columns. To protect against building collapse, staff moved high-value medical equipment donated by UK-based church groups to the street where it was exposed to rain that began the same evening.

According to a church official present at the time, the building had to be surrounded by GoE security personnel during the demolition to prevent angry local residents from interfering with the work of the demolition crew. An Egyptian national priest was arrested for resisting the demolition and released later the same day. According to church officials, he claimed to have been mistreated in custody including rough handling and beatings while his hands were bound.

¶3. (SBU) The UK Consul General in Alexandria told APP Alexandria Principal Officer that the NGO had begun receiving written advisories from the Governorate of Alexandria of the demolition order starting in January 2007, but had been unsuccessful in its attempts to get a hearing with governorate officials to reconsider. The demolition was suspended only upon direct intervention of the British Ambassador with the Governor of Alexandria, who claimed ignorance of the specific case and agreed to meet with church representatives from Cairo.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Demolitions of unlicensed buildings have been a central feature of Alexandria's new (since August 2006) Governor Adel Labib's program to instill stronger regulations and to bring order to the city's building program, the lack of which had led over the years to substandard construction, overbuilding, and poor urban planning. Church officials claim, however, that the Anglican NGO (located in the Ras Al-Soda neighborhood) was the only building in the area targeted for demolition, though it was not the only unlicensed structure. Church officials also complain that significant costs were incurred in the establishment of the clinic, including installation of diagnostic and other advanced medical equipment purchased by UK-based church groups valued at GBP 500,000, according to a church official.
Ricciardone